



Kalimantan

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Best Jungle River Journeys

- Sungai Bungan–Tanjung Lokan by motorised canoe (p598)
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Best Places to Stay

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- Hotel Gran Senyuir (p616)
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Why Go?

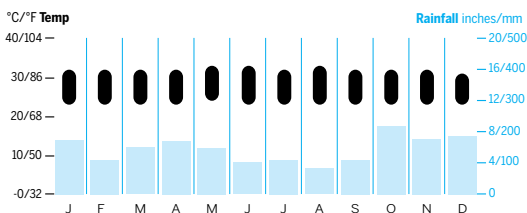
Skewered by the equator and roasting under a tropical sun, the steamy forests of Kalimantan serve up endless opportunities for epic rainforest exploration. The island has no volcanoes and is protected from tsunamis, which has allowed its ancient forests to grow towering trees that house some of the world's most memorable species. The noble orangutan shares the canopy with acrobatic gibbons, while prehistoric hornbills patrol the air above.

The indigenous people, collectively known as Dayak, have long lived in concert with this rich, challenging landscape. Their longhouses dot the banks of Kalimantan's many waterways, creating a sense of community unmatched elsewhere in a country already well-known for its hospitable people.

Kalimantan's natural resources have made it a prime target for exploitation; just three quarters of Borneo's lowland forests remain, and its once abundant wildlife and rich traditional cultures are rapidly disappearing. Visit this awesome wilderness as soon as you can, while you still can.

When to Go

Pontianak



Dec–Mar Abundant fruit, including rare types of durian, brings orangutans into view.

Jul–Sep Dry season makes travelling easier, but air may be hazy from fires.

Aug–Sep Clearest water for diving in Derawan.

History & Culture

Separated from Southeast Asia's mainland 10,000 years ago by rising seas, Kalimantan was originally populated by the Dayak, who still define its public image. The culture of these diverse forest tribes once included headhunting, extensive tattooing, stretched earlobes, blowguns and longhouses – horizontal apartment buildings big enough to house an entire village. That culture has been slowly dismantled by the modern world, so that some elements, such as headhunting (thankfully, no longer exist, while others are slowly disappearing. Tribal identity persists, but many Dayak have either abandoned their traditional folk religion, Kaharingan, or combined it with Christianity (or Islam).

In addition to the Dayak, Kalimantan contains two other large ethnic groups: the Chinese and the Malay. The Chinese are the region's most successful merchants, having traded in Kalimantan since at least 300 BC. They're responsible for the bright red Confucian and Buddhist temples found in many port towns, and for a profusion of Chinese restaurants, some of Kalimantan's best dining. The Malays are predominantly Muslim, a religion that arrived with the Melaka empire in the 15th century. The most obvious signs of their presence are the grand mosques in major cities and towns, along with the call to prayer. Several palaces of Muslim sultanates, some still occupied by royal descendants, can be visited.

Since colonial times, Kalimantan has been a destination for *transmigrasi*, the government-sponsored relocation of people from more densely populated areas of the archipelago. This and an influx of jobseekers from throughout Indonesia has led to some conflict, most notably a year-long struggle between Dayak and Madurese people (from the island of Madura) in 2001, which killed 500 people, and a smaller conflict in 2010 between Dayak and Bugis in Tarakan.

Most of the struggle in Kalimantan, however, has taken place over its bountiful natural resources, and involved foreign powers. Oil, rubber, spices, timber, coal, diamonds and gold have all been pawns on the board, causing many years of intrigue, starting with British and Dutch colonial interests. During World War II oil and other resources made Borneo (the island which is home to Kalimantan) an early target for Japan, leading to a brutal occupation, in which some 21,000

people were murdered in West Kalimantan alone. In 1963 Indonesian President Sukarno led a failed attempt to take over all of Borneo by staging attacks on the Malaysian north.

Today, the struggle for Kalimantan's resources is more insidious. As one watches the endless series of enormous coal barges proceed down rivers lined with tin-roofed shacks, there is the constant sense of an on-going plunder from which the local people benefit little, as they are outmanoeuvred by a shadowy collection of foreign businesspeople and local government officials overseen from Jakarta. Meanwhile, as palm-oil plantations spread across the landscape, the Bornean jungle recedes, never to return. Numerous conservation groups are struggling to halt the social and environmental damage, and to save some remarkable wildlife. Best to visit soon.

Wildlife

Kalimantan's flora and fauna are among the most diverse in the world. You can find more tree species in a single hectare of its rainforest than in all of the US and Canada combined. There are over 220 species of mammal and over 420 species of bird found on Borneo, many of them endemic to the island. The region is best known for its orangutans, Asia's only great ape and a rare but thrilling sight outside of Kalimantan's many rescue and rehabilitation centres. River cruising commonly reveals proboscis monkeys (unique to Borneo), macaques, gibbons, crocodiles (including gharials), monitor lizards and pythons. Hornbills are commonly seen flying overhead, and are a spiritual symbol for many Dayak. Forests harbour the rare clouded leopard, sun bears, giant moths, tarantulas, and more bizarre species of ants and spiders than you could ever conjure out of your wildest imagination. For divers, the Derawan Archipelago is renowned for its turtles, manta rays and pelagics.

i Getting There & Away

The only entry points to Kalimantan that issue visas on arrival are Balikpapan's Sepinggan Airport, Pontianak's Supadio Airport and the Tebedu–Entikong land crossing between Kuching (Sarawak) and Pontianak. All other entry points require a visa issued in advance.

AIR

Most major cities can be reached from Jakarta or Surabaya. Pontianak connects with Kuching (Malaysia), while Balikpapan has direct flights to